

Herald Sun

Social media new tool for fire warnings

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FIRE and emergency authorities may soon use sites like Instagram and Facebook to warn people about bushfires, an information systems expert says.

Katina Michael, associate professor at the school of information systems and technology at the University of Wollongong, says people are increasingly using micro-blogging sites, like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, to record bushfires.

"These unofficial channels are extremely useful during a crisis situation," she told an Australian Science Media Centre briefing on Tuesday.

"In the future we might even have emergency service organisations tapping into this social media capability ... and using this user-generated content to respond to disasters more effectively."

Prof Michael said location-based SMS alerts are also being employed to keep people updated in disaster areas.

"That's a real innovation to the Australian capabilities which I think is among the first in the world to actually venture into that kind of mandated approach.

"This also allows people who are visiting a location, who may be working in a location ... or who may be enjoying recreation activities in a location to be warned about a hazard."

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